

ENGAGED
COMMUNITIES SERIES

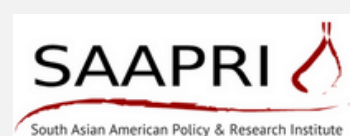


UNPACKING HATE

Here's what you need to know

**Intersecting Identities: Confronting Hate Against
Queer South Asian Americans**

June 12, 2025



Our Panelists

UNPACKING HATE

Intersecting Identities: Confronting Hate Against Queer South Asian Americans



Aruna Rao

Founder, Desi Rainbow Parents & Allies



Kareem Khubchandani

Associate Professor, Tufts University

Panel Highlights

Queerness Has Always Existed in the South Asian Community

- Queer people have **always** been a part of South Asian migration stories
- The notion that queerness is new or foreign is **false**; it's simply been marginalized or made invisible

Community Building Emerged from Loneliness & Exclusion

- *Trikone* and *Sangat* were created as spaces of belonging amidst racism in mainstream LGBTQ+ spaces and stigmatization within South Asian communities
- They began as social circles and later evolved into advocacy and support hubs

HIV/AIDS Crisis Spurred Activism in the 1980s

- *Inspired by radical movements like ACT UP, South Asian queer organizations began organizing for health equity and visibility during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a period that catalyzed public queer South Asian presence.*

“Finding inclusion in larger dominant spaces has always been a part of the battle for South Asian queer folks.”

— Kareem Khubchandani

Panel Highlights

Intersectional Marginalization is Deep and Ongoing

“The critique of one’s lifestyle by other queer people make you self-conscious about whether you belong in queer spaces at all.”

— Kareem Khubchandani

Layers of Marginalization

- Queer South Asians face:
 - Racism in LGBTQ spaces,
 - Queerphobia within South Asian families,
 - Xenophobia within overall society in the U.S.
- These overlapping oppressions lead to serious vulnerabilities—social isolation, mental health struggles, and even physical danger.

Queer South Asians Are Often Othered Twice

- In mainstream LGBTQ spaces, they’re racialized and exoticized. In South Asian communities, they’re often disowned or erased. This dual marginalization intensifies stigma and invisibility.

“The majority of our children delay coming out until they’re emotionally, financially, and physically safe, and the majority of LGBTQ folks of school and college age are not out with their families, so they don’t feel safe with their communities/families.”

— Aruna Rao

Coming Out is a Choice, Not a Requirement

Coming Out is Not Mandatory

- Both Khubchandani and Rao stress that coming out is not mandatory—especially if safety is at stake.
- Lower-stakes spaces like online communities or anonymous art can offer outlets for identity exploration without risk

Drag as a Tool for Reclamation and Joy

- Drag provides an expressive art form for reclaiming cultural identity, especially for queer South Asians estranged from their communities
- Events like Dragistan offer affirmation and visibility, drawing in both queer and straight audiences through shared cultural aesthetics

“You don’t have to come out. Coming out is an option but not the only one. You can be queer without having to do so.”

— Kareem Khubchandani

Intersectional Struggles & Systemic Threats

Systemic Violence Against Immigrant Queer Folks is Escalating

- With rising anti-immigrant and anti-trans sentiment in the U.S., queer immigrants face new barriers—from visa denials for trans folks to detention center abuse and fears of deportation
- Many flee homophobia abroad only to find danger here

Commitments Must be Transnational and Intersectional

- Queer South Asians in the diaspora must recognize their privilege (especially caste, class, and immigration access) and actively support grassroots movements in South Asia
- Effective solidarity with South Asian queer movements abroad requires listening, funding, and building reciprocal relationships—not casting the West as the savior and the East as helpless.

“Rather than creating the dichotomy that “we are able to do it here, but they can’t do it there,” it’s better to create symbiotic relationships in which we learn from those organizers and artists and listen to their calls for help.”

–Kareem Khubchandani

Caste and Class Shape Access to Queer Liberation

Caste & Class Shape Who Gets Seen & Heard

- Khubchandani reminds us that wealthier, upper-caste South Asians are more likely to migrate and access queer spaces.
- Community organizing must be caste-conscious and inclusive of diasporas beyond India.

“Indian Americans are one of the wealthiest minority communities in the U.S. We use our investment in the model minority path to create rifts between communities that we could have other relationships and commitments to.”

— Kareem Khubchandani

“

“We have to talk about caste. Who gets to make it to the U.S. who already have the cast privilege to make it to the U.S. in order to participate in queer communities here?”

— Kareem Khubchandani

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Highlighting Queer Voices Must Be Year-Round

Family and Community Reactions Can Be Damaging

- Many LGBTQ South Asian youth stay closeted due to fear of rejection, forced concealment, or emotional abuse. Even well-meaning families can inadvertently cause harm by framing queerness as a problem to “fix.”

Queer South Asians Face Unique Safety Threats

- From racism on dating apps to being targeted by serial killers (as in Toronto), queer South Asians are often isolated and vulnerable—especially recent migrants or asylum seekers with little familial support.

Highlighting & Supporting Queer Voices

- Organizations should uplift queer and trans South Asians beyond Pride Month. Visibility, education, and policy advocacy must be integrated throughout the year and woven into broader community work.



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RESOURCES

FOR A COMPREHENSIVE, COMMUNITY-ROOTED
COLLECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH, CULTURAL, AND
SUPPORT RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ+ SOUTH ASIANS, VISIT:

DESI RAINBOW'S RESOURCES PAGE
WWW.DESIRAINBOW.ORG/RESOURCES

SOME NATIONAL & REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- 1** SALGA NYC SALGA.ORG
SOUTH ASIAN LESBIAN AND GAY ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK CITY
- 2** TRIKONE (CHICAGO, BAY AREA, ETC.) TRIKONE.ORG
ONE OF THE OLDEST SOUTH ASIAN LGBTQ+ ORGS
- 3** KHUSHDC / KHUSHATX / KHUSH MIDWEST [HTTPS://WWW.KHUSHDC.COM/](https://www.khushdc.com/)
REGIONAL COMMUNITY GROUPS WITH EVENTS AND PEER SUPPORT
- 4** SATRANG - LOS ANGELES [HTTPS://SATRANG.ORG/](https://satrang.org/)
ESTABLISHED IN 1997



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SERIES!

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND LEGAL PROTECTIONS IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Join us for a critical conversation on workplace rights in light of recent federal policy shifts. With the Trump administration's announced rollbacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, it's more important than ever to understand how these changes may impact workplace protections and what you can do to safeguard your rights.



Moderator
Sufyan Sohel



Panelist
Sharmili Majmudar
Executive Vice President
(Policy, Programs, &
Research), Women Employed



Panelist
Neha R. Shah
Of Counsel, Meyers Nave
(Labor & Employment Law)

SCAN TO
REGISTER



JULY 10

3PM PT | 5PM CT | 6PM ET

Register here: <https://tinyurl.com/workplacelegalprotections>

For more information
contact us at:
community@saapri.org